I wish to show how a particular dimension of language, namely, discourse, and, more specifically, the text and its corresponding world, can influence the being and, subsequently, the action of a person. For language affects both the entity and the moral actions of a person. There is an influence of the text on the thinking, then on the being, and, finally, on the moral action of an individual. This is why the print media, as much as other media of communication, exert such a powerful influence — for the better, but also for the worse — on people.

Presuppositions

In the first place, we assert that language is a dominant factor in reality. Following Hegel, we affirm that language is active and creative when it comes to being in so far as it organizes conceptually the chaotic world of sense experience.¹

In the world of ethical order, in law and command, and in the actual world, in counsel only, language has the essence for its content and is the form of that content; but here it has for its content the form itself, the form which language itself is, and is authoritative as language. It is the power of speech, as that which performs what has to be performed. For it is the real existence of the pure self as self; in speech, self-consciousness, qua independent separate individuality, comes as such into existence, so that it exists for others ... Language, however, contains it in its purity, it alone expresses the 'I,' the 'I' itself.²

² Ibid., pp. 308, 395, 396.
Secondly, we assert that there is a reality independent of language, and the latter has the task of describing it adequately. Even if language is not entirely adequate, things could still be in some pure sense. Inasmuch as language is capable of describing reality as it is, this relation is a good indication of its structure.  

Thirdly, in the triadic schema of language, the image — as symbol or sign — is connected with both the concept or thought and the referent. This last-mentioned element or dimension of language is vital to our present discussion. For it is our contention that language and being, or language and reality, are not independent of each other.

Fourthly, while we can view language as a system or a structure which is distinct from reality and action, there is a mediating point between them, and this is discourse. By discourse, we refer to an event in which somebody says something meaningful about something to somebody. We can also refer to discourse as a linguistic expression which has meaning. Now, meaning is understood as both the significance or the concept and the referent or the signified.

Etymologically, “discourse” comes from the Latin, discurrere, discursus -a -um, meaning “that which has been run through.” The French discours means “a formal, orderly and usually extended expression of thought on a particular subject.” We shall take ‘discourse’ to refer to a meaningful linguistic expression that can either be written or oral. For a better description of discourse we give it the following characteristics: (1) it is a temporal event, in contradistinction to language as langue, which is an atemporal ideal system; (2) discourse requires a speaker because it is said by someone, and this someone can be indicated by such grammatical devices as the first person pronoun, “I” (3) discourse has an audience which can also be designated, which is why we can say that discourse is not a system without an object; (4) finally, discourse is an event which refers to something forming part of the context of the act of discourse. In sum, it is an event in the real world.  

Fifthly, discourse becomes fixed by means of text that records and gives the former a permanent status for posterity to examine and get

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the message. The meaning or meanings of the text, however, have to be discovered under some conditions.

Lastly, the hypotheses presented in this paper will have their affirmation through examples taken from real life. Instances of what really happened will not only serve to illustrate but will also affirm the statements we are going to assert.

**Text**

By text, we mean the result of writing or depicting which fixes discourse and preserves its characteristics of meaning when the event of oral discourse or speaking ceases. The meaning can be expressed, preserved and transmitted across cultural and temporal distances. By means of a text, language continues to be meaningful even if the transference of meaning calls for an act of interpretation which recovers it in the act of appropriation. Texts exhibit the following characteristics:

1. They are not always transcriptions of spoken language, for it is possible to directly proceed to writing as a form of discourse. For example, the epic poems of Homer were handed over from one generation to another in oral tradition before they were placed in written form. Likewise, the Scriptures — specifically, the Gospels — which were originally narrative accounts of the life and deeds of the Lord as preached by the first disciples. Only later were these oral accounts committed to writing by the later disciples who wanted to preserve them for succeeding generations of disciples. In contrast, today's editorial columns are immediately given as written texts without going through the stage of oral communication.

2. Once the text has fixed discourse, autonomy is given from the author's original intention. Thus, the text has consequences which the author could not have foreseen or anticipated. Moreover, the text may be used in a way which was never intended by the writer. For example, the publication of the private correspondence of Jose P. Rizal rendered his letters public property and subject to the interpretation of whomsoever cared to read them. A text outlasts and thereby escapes both its original audience and situation. Subsequently, it passes over to that
indefinite audience consisting of anyone capable of reading. There are three kinds of autonomy: (i) autonomy from the author’s intention; (ii) autonomy from the original audience, and (iii) autonomy from the original situation.

(3) In the case of texts, the meaning, both as sense and referent, is not determined in the same way as the meaning of spoken discourse. To explain: in speaking, certain devices, such as gestures and inflections of voice can be used. In the case of texts, however, we cannot avail ourselves of such devices. In the absence of such devices, we have to pay attention to such factors as syntactic and narrative structures. When dealing with the referent, the matter becomes more complicated. Whereas in the act of speaking, ostensive reference is possible because the people involved in the dialogue share a common present and a common situation, this is not the case when we read a text. The author, original addressee, and original situation are no longer present to point to the referent. What is worse, they might not be known. For texts, the referent is its own “world”; specifically, it is a world which is to be understood existentially as a possible world for understanding oneself. It is also a potential mode of existing. In short, the text’s referent is a world as a new way of understanding self and reality.

Distanciation

We understand “distanciation” to mean the separation of a text from its author, original audience, and original situation. Distanciation can be of at least two kinds. One can speak of (1) cultural distanciation. With the passage of time, older texts such as myths and symbols of fault, together with the corresponding Christian symbols of these themes, lose their immediate authority. For this reason, all earlier texts are lost with the passage of time. In a way, we can also call this “temporal distanciation.” We can also speak of, (2) methodological distanciation, and by this we mean that newer texts are similarly distanced from the author owing to the requirement that the critical method forces the separation of the text from its author in order for the former to be scrutinized objectively. Thus, a novel or a scientific theory undergoes critical scrutiny from experts or reviewers armed with literary or scientific
"scalpels." In a word, distanciation is not alienation but a necessary condition for the preservation of meaning.

On the importance of distanciation, we have this to say. First, it separates the meaning from the event, the saying from the said. Secondly, it guarantees the autonomy of the text from its author, original situation and audience. In this manner, the text is preserved from the perishing of the moment, for it decontextualizes the text to allow for the recontextualization of its message at another moment, before another audience, as well as for the reader to enter the world of discourse vacated by the author. The king of the Franks, for example, upon hearing the passion narrative, raised his weapons in a fit of anger and exclaimed that the death of Jesus would have never taken place if he and his army of Frankish warriors had been there. Thirdly, distanciation is a sufficient, although not a necessary, condition for any participation beyond the original situation. Thus, the reference of the text can consist of, (i) the world of the text, and (ii) the self of the reader who enters into the world of possibilities. This probably explains the popularity of Filipino comics, and such novels as D.H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover, and Andrew Greeley’s Cardinal Sins. Finally, distanciation adds to the text’s ability to redescribe reality. It suggests a kind of being in the world which is revealed in the text, subsequently explained, and finally understood. Thus, the reader discovers a world that he might inhabit and in which he might project his own possibilities.5

The proposed world introduces the final form of distanciation: that of the subject from himself, as the precondition for self-understanding and action. In reading the text, we enter into its world of possibilities, and thus distanciation comes about. The text is the medium by which we come to self-understanding, which is distinct from alienation, and eventually action.6

Understanding the Text

Our concern is to understand the meaning of discourse fixed in a text as in a literary work. At this point, we differ from the romanticist manner of understanding which maintains that, (1) texts are expres-

6Ibid., p. 141.
sions of life; (2) nature and mind are separate; (3) interpretation is only a part of understanding; (4) explanation and understanding are distinct from each other, and, finally, (5) that the aim of hermeneutics is to understand an author better than he understood himself. With the romanticist theory of understanding comes the task as well of “guessing” the mind of the author, being in “communion,” or “congeniality,” with him, in order to discover his intention and the product of his genius.

The truth of the matter, however, is this, that the author can no longer “rescue” his work. Moreover, his intention is often unknown to us, is redundant, and does not help to know. This being the case, the author’s work has to be taken in the light of the text itself. We are given the objective task to understand it and determine its meaning without needing to “read” the mind of the author himself, especially as his psychic experience is hardly communicable. Nevertheless, the objective meaning of an author’s written discourse can be construed, that is, guessed or interpreted. This last point brings us to the topic of interpretation.

**Interpretation**

We take interpretation to mean the act and the art of construing or guessing the objective meaning of an author’s written discourse. In this process of interpretation, which mediates between explanation and understanding, misunderstanding can transpire; it is unavoidable. To interpret or construe the meaning as the verbal meaning of the text is to make a guess. But while there are no rules for making good guesses, there are methods for making our guesses valid.

The act of understanding is, at first, a genial (or a mistaken) guess, and there are no methods for making guesses, no rules for generating insights. The methodological activity of interpretation commences when we begin to test or criticize our guesses.  

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9 E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 203. One can also say that construing or guessing is the “divinatory validation of the grammatical.”
To cite some rules for interpreting or validating guesses on texts, there is the rule that to construe the verbal meaning of a text is to construe it as a whole. A written text is not merely a linear sequence of sentences. Rather, it is a cumulative, holistic process. While individual words and sentences can have several meanings, the text itself, due to its particular structure, the relation between the whole and its parts, and the presence of topics and subtopics, can have several meanings. Thus, judgment is needed as to what is important or not so important in the text, what the meanings are of the individual sentences in themselves and in relation to the text as a whole, and finally, what the meaning is of the text as such. It is here that judgment, or guessmaking, comes into play. What is more, to construe a text is to guess its meaning as an individual. There are generic as well as genetic rules which bring about the individuality of a text. One can differentiate between novels, essays, poems, historical accounts, editorials and journalistic reports. The individuality of a text is viewed as a function of its literary genre, the species of texts to which it belongs, and the kinds of codes or structures that come into play in the text. We also guess as regards the localization and individualization of a particular text. In short, a text as a whole and as a singular whole, is comparable to an object which may be examined from several sides, but never from all sides at once. The reconstruction of the whole, therefore, has a perspectival aspect similar to that of a perceived object. It is always possible for a sentence to be related in different ways to the key sentence in a text. Furthermore, the literary texts involve potential horizons of meaning that may be actualized in different meanings. Texts have layers of primary and secondary meanings. The latter, as in the case of a horizon surrounding objects of perception, give to the text the possibility of several readings and meanings. Even these readings are subject to the prescriptions of meaning belonging to the margins of potential meaning which surround the semantic nucleus of the text. However, even these prescriptions have to be construed before they can rule the work of interpretation. Validation is not verification; rather, it is closer to the logic of probability than to the logic of empirical verification.

10 Interpretation Theory, p. 78.
In summary, we say that while there is always more than one way of construing or interpreting a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal. The text presents a limited field of possible constructions. Conjecture or interpretation has its logic of validation which permits one to move between the two limits of strict dogmatism and destructive skepticism. There is always the possibility to argue for or against an interpretation, to critically examine interpretations, to arbitrate between them and reconcile them, even if this agreement remains beyond our immediate reach.\footnote{Ibid, p. 79.}

In oral discourse, ostensive terms and meanings bridge the gap between the event and its meaning, between the sense and the reference. However, such is not the case with the text or written discourse, although there are ostensive devices such as demonstrative pronouns. With the written text, what prevails is not so much the designated situation as the world-of-the-text. A suspension or bracketing of the world of ordinary language takes place. Therefore, in reading a text, one may suspend the reference of the text to exterior reality, so that the text becomes a worldless entity. Thus, the text becomes a closed system of signs, as in the case of the Oedipus myth and the four columns constructed by Levy-Strauss. Or one may create a new ostensive reference by virtue of the kind of “execution” that the act of reading implies. By virtue of depth semantics, the reader is led to discover the world of the text which is a non-ostensive reference. The text has a sense which is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not hidden, but disclosed. Any explanation leads to an understanding, not of the initial situation of discourse or the author’s mind and situation, but towards a possible world.\footnote{In a class I conducted for graduate students, I asked some of them to analyze Sophocles’ play, Oedipus. My attention was drawn a woman in the class who was quietly sobbing in her chair. During the break she confided in me that the figure of Oedipus, who married his own mother after killing his father, recalled to her own mind a recollection of her own father, a former priest who was not too faithful to his own wife, her mother. In just the same manner that Oedipus’ daughters had loved the mythical hero, my student understood and forgave her father his sins.}

Understanding seeks to “comprehend” or grasp the world of propositions opened up by the reference of the text. Understanding a text means following its movement from sense to reference, that is, from
what it says to what it talks about. The reference, which the text speaks of, is a possible world and a possible way of orienting oneself within it. The text opens up or discloses the dimensions of a possible world. Thus, while we have ostensive reference in oral language, we have discourse in written language. Discourse goes beyond the mere function of pointing out and showing what already exists. Beyond the function of ostensive reference in oral language, the showing or reference involved in written discourse is also a creating a new mode of being. The epistemological value of distanciation consists in the fact that the text — objectified and dehistoricized — becomes the necessary mediation between the writer and his reader.  

Appropriation

The ultimate objective of explanation leading to understanding and interpretation is appropriation, which we describe as “the making one’s own of what was formerly foreign or belonging to someone else.” While interpretation aims at equalizing, rendering contemporaneous, and assimilating, in the sense of making similar for anyone who reads the text, appropriation stands for the actualization of the text’s meaning as addressed here and now to the reader. Interpretation finally becomes appropriation when the reading of a text “produces” an event of discourse that becomes specifically an event of the present moment. In appropriation, interpretation becomes an event even in the life of the reader.  

However, we should not take appropriation to mean a going back to in order to recapture the author’s original intention, hidden in the text, the original situation or addressee(s) of the discourse. Appropriation is not to be taken either as a recapturing of the feelings or expecta-

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14 Let us take the case of another female student whose high school teacher would browbeat the class with remarks such as, “You’re all good for nothing!” Instead of becoming downcast, the girl took her teacher’s insults as a challenge. She became determined to prove to her teacher and to everyone else that she was capable of doing good, and much good at that! She worked her way through college, became an entrepreneur, and eventually put up her own company. Behind her desk in her office, she enshrined the words, “You are good for nothing!,” but under which she added the rejoinder, “Definitely not!”
tions of the original readers, not even of their understanding of themselves as historical and cultural phenomena. To understand an author better than he could understand himself is to stretch the power of disclosure implied in his text beyond the limited horizon of his own existential situation. Distanciation, with its atemporalization and separation from the author, original situation, and audience, militates against this view.\textsuperscript{15}

Moreover, appropriation does not warrant that the reader would subject the meaning of the text to the limited capacities of his own understanding. This view is tantamount to a kind of pre-understanding and a mere projection of one's own prejudices. Appropriation is neither the reader's nor the subject's projection of the \textit{a priori} of his self-understanding into the text and then reading it into the text.\textsuperscript{16} In truth, what is appropriated or "made one's own" is not something mental or the intention of another subject which is hidden in the text. What we really appropriate is the project-of-the-world, the proposition of a mode of being in the world which the text displays in front of itself by means of non-ostensive references.

Positively, appropriation aims at the meaning of the text itself conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text. In other words, appropriation has the power of disclosing a world that constitutes the reference of the text. Taking exception with the romanticist view of making one's own another person's psyche, genius, life or mind, one should understand appropriation as being aimed at the disclosure of a possible way of looking at things and self as the genuine referential points of the text. Far from being a meeting of minds or taking a sympathetic approach to another person's mind in order to understand him, appropriation comes close to a "fusion of horizons" wherein the world horizon of the reader fuses with the world horizon of the writer. The meeting point in this process of horizon-fusing is the

\textsuperscript{15}The Pauline letters, for example, are addressed to us, no less than to the Romans, Galatians, Corinthians and Ephesians. The meaning of these letters is open to anyone who can read due to the omnitemporality or the ideal character of its meaning. Thus, the historicity of reading is the counterpart of this specific omnitemporality insofar as, through distanciation, the text has been freed from its author, his situation and the original audience. Once written, a text may and should find new readers.

\textsuperscript{16}Interpretation Theory, pp. 93-94.
ideality of the text. With appropriation comes the process by which new forms of being, or new forms of life, give to the reader a new capacity of knowing and being himself. The corresponding action will follow. Therefore, appropriation is no longer seen as a kind of possession or a way of taking hold of things. Rather, it is a widening of the reader’s capacity of self-projection as he or she receives a new mode of being from the text itself. Furthermore, appropriation implies an instance of renunciation of the self and self-loving ego. This process of renunciation is carried out by the kind of universality and atemporality underlined in the process of explanation. In turn, the universality is linked to the disclosing power of the text as distinct from any kind of ostensive reference. Only the interpretation that pays attention to the text, which follows the “arrow” of the sense and tries to think accordingly will reach a new self-understanding, being and acting. In this self-understanding, the self — which proceeds from the understanding of the text — is opposed to the ego which is prior to the self. Through the text and its universal power of world disclosure, the ego becomes the self.\(^\text{18}\)

**Conclusion**

We have argued that, first of all, language affects being and subsequently the acting — appropriate or not — of the individual. Specifically, texts, as a particular dimension of language, exercise a distinct effect on individuals who read them. Texts, as the permanent form of discourse, exercise their influence across time, space, religion and race. Such is the case because the meaning or meanings of written discourse are endowed with atemporality. Texts from the past, whether from the ancient times or from the last century, will have their meanings understood and then put into action by readers in the third or even the fourth millenium. Presented with a particular text, the reader has the capacity, at least the opportunity, to enter the world of discourse with its various meanings generated by the fusion of the author’s and the reader’s horizons. As a consequence, there will be possibilities of thinking, being and acting.

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\(^{18}\) *Interpretation Theory*, pp. 93-95.
These possibilities are opened up and presented when the reader enters into the world of the text. The ego of the reader becomes the self. Some of the actions resulting from the discovery of the meanings hidden in texts might surprise observers but would be understood if and when viewed from the perspective of the world of discourse.

We have presented an understanding of the relationship between texts, being and acting. With the advent of other media, like the visual, auditory, and image-oriented forms of it, whose status can be prolonged when given atemporality by technology, other worlds, with their corresponding possibilities, are presented to the perceivers. At present, the invasion of data and propaganda coming fast and strong along the information highway will definitely shape the thinking, being and acting of the present generation. While much good can be generated by such forms of mass communication and information, in the hands of unscrupulous people, these various forms of media can unleash tremendous harm.